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Chair

Mr. Michael Levitt

Subcommittee on International Human Rights of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

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● (1300)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC)): Good afternoon, colleagues. We're in the 110th meeting of the Subcommittee on International Human Rights.

Before us today, we have Ms. Kalambay.

Can you hear me?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay (As an Individual): Yes, I hear you well. Thank you.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): She is testifying as an individual.

Then, we have Mr. Kabuya, who is an adviser with the Congolese community in the greater Toronto area. He'll be testifying as the adviser.

Why don't we begin with you, Ms. Kalambay. You have 10 minutes for your opening remarks.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Kabuya and I are appearing today to lend our voice to those in Congo who have no voice.

We live in Canada, a country where human rights are very important and valued. In Congo, on the other hand, something highly unusual is happening.

A number of us maintain that there are no human rights in Congo, and that has been the case for a few years. Right now, there are still wars going on. As we speak, there are still children, men, and especially women who are being killed in unbelievable circumstances. Children are being used in wars, in the mines, and for all kinds of other cruel things.

We are appearing here because we want the committee to make the voice of the Congolese people heard. These things are all known, but no one is doing anything at all, no one is talking about it, and no one is showing an interest in resolving this problem in Congo.

A few years ago, genocides were committed in the countries neighbouring Congo and there were some deaths. More has happened in Congo than during the Rwandan genocide, but no one is talking about out or talking enough about it to stop it.

There are MONUSCO contingents in Congo, but they are not stopping anything at all. The government continues to mistreat the population throughout Congo. It continues to mistreat the opposition. Anyone who speaks out against the government will suffer some kind of atrocity, so to speak.

My hope today is that this committee will get to the bottom of this problem and look for effective solutions to help the Congolese people.

I am speaking on behalf of my people, who are dying every day, suffering, and do not have the minimum of what we have here. By that I mean the bare necessities of life: water, education, the right to health, the right to a social life, and the right to peace. None of that exists in Congo. Even though the government is trying to portray the situation differently, we all know that these things are not part of daily life in Congo.

Recently, there have once again been many deaths in small towns throughout Congo, but no one is talking about it, not even the central government. I am saying this to illustrate where we stand with our government.

We would like the support of the government of Canada and of all governments of the world for the welfare of the Congolese people. That is why I am appearing before you today.

● (1305)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much.

We have Mr. Kabuya now for 10 minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya (Advisor, Communauté congolaise de la grande région de Toronto): Mr. Chair, thank you for inviting us.

It is truly an honour to be here today to talk about a situation that you are already very familiar with. As you know, I am an advisor to the Communauté congolaise de la grande région de Toronto, or COCOT, a non-profit organization in Toronto that works with Congolese people and helps them integrate into life in Canada.

We are appearing to talk about the wholesale violation of human rights in Congo. These violations occur every day. When I say "every day", I truly mean each and every day.

You are aware that there have been further killings in Kasai this morning. These violations are committed by law enforcement personnel which are being exploited by Mr. Joseph Kabila. As you surely know, Mr. Kabila's term in office was supposed to end on December 19, 2016. Mr. Kabila does not want to resign, however, and he has taken the country hostage. Not only does he refuse to resign, he does not want to hold the elections that were due as of December 19, 2016.

Mr. Kabila is using law enforcement personnel, who are committing all kinds of crimes every day. These crimes involve among other things violence and rape of children, women and seniors, most of whom are among the most vulnerable members of our society.

As the Subcommittee on Human Rights, you surely know that on December 10, 1948, the 58 members of the UN Security Council adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at the United Nations General Assembly. That was in Paris. I would like to recall a few of the things that were agreed upon and that all the nations signed off on.

The declaration refers to the "recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family", as the foundation for freedom, justice, and peace in the world. The declaration also states that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood." In other words, every person has the right to life, freedom, and personal safety.

In spite of this definition, to which the Congo is a signatory as are Canada and the other UN member countries, Congo is mired in unprecedented tragedy. The year 1997 marked the arrival of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo, or AFDL, which at the time was welcomed as an alliance of democratic forces for the liberation of Congo. We see today, however, that the AFDL is an occupation force.

I say "occupation force" because, in 1997, Mr. Laurent-Désiré Kabila arrived in Congo with Rwandan and Ugandan military forces. Since there was a genocide in Rwanda, they claimed that the criminals who had committed the genocide in Rwanda were hiding in Congo. We now know that this was not the case. Since 1997, when the AFDL arrived with Rwanda and Ugandan armed forces, more than 12 million people have been killed: civilians, innocent people, children, in short, the most vulnerable members of our society, as I said earlier.

What is shocking to Congolese people in Canada and other defenders of human rights is that most organizations, including the UN, through its Security Council, Amnesty International, the UN High Commission on Human Rights, Human Rights Watch, the Observatoire national des droits de l'homme, human rights networks, nations' ministries of foreign affairs, including the U.S. State Department, the Country Reports on Human Rights, Global Witness, and many others, have produced reports as usual.

There is an annual report on Congo every year. These reports not only provide information about the atrocities committed in Congo, but in fact name the people behind those crimes. In the UN Security Council report and the UN mapping report of 2003, there is a list of mining companies, including some Canadian companies, that have been accused of human rights violations in Congo.

● (1310)

Unfortunately, they also include the names of certain political and economic leaders from Canada and other western countries, who close their eyes to human rights violations in locations where mining companies are extracting strategic raw materials.

What we are trying to say is that, in 1994, there was of course a genocide orchestrated by Paul Kagame and his forces, who had come to liberate and restore power in Rwanda. This action resulted in the death of 800,000 people and, as soon as this horrible thing happened, the whole international community and the UN labelled it "genocide". On the one hand, they were right, it was truly a genocide.

Congo, on the other hand, has lost 12 million people. I said 12 million people, or a third of the population of Canada. The international community is hesitating and is slow to label these crimes what they truly are. The real name of the crimes happening in Congo today is "genocide".

In appearing before you today, we are asking you what you can do to bring justice.

We think the Congolese people have suffered and will continue to suffer because those who are behind these crimes, which are committed every day in Congo, are in power and they intend to stay there and retain power for as long as possible, using armed force, of course.

You will not be surprised to hear that more crimes will be committed tomorrow, such as those we are hearing about in Kasai, Kivu, Tshikapa, Ituri, and now in the capital of Kinshasa.

Our hope today is that Canada will bring its full weight to bear. Canada is respected around the world and at the UN. We hope Canada can make the case for the effective establishment of democracy in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Thank you.

● (1315)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much, Mr. Kabuya.

Now we'll go to the rounds of questioning, and we'll start off with Mr. Anderson for seven minutes.

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank our guests for being here today.

You were talking a bit about the Kasai region. I'm wondering if you can give us a bit more information on the struggle that's going on there. We understand a number of armed groups have formed and have been fighting with each other.

Because that was previously an opposition stronghold, I'm wondering how much of the conflict there is created by internal politics and division and tribal affairs. I'm wondering how much of it is being encouraged from outside, because it was a politically strong area for the opposition. Who's been behind the conflict there? Can we point to any place that might be able to suggest some solutions to that situation?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: Thank you for your question.

Kasai is just one region, located in the centre of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The thing about Kasai is that it is full of people who, for the most part, are supporters of the Union pour la démocratie et le progrès social, the UDPS, which is the party opposing the occupation power in Congo.

Your question pertains to proportion and responsibility.

In Congo, when shots are fired, the order comes from just one man, Joseph Kabila. Joseph Kabila has now taken over all the political space in Congo. The order was issued by his ministers of the interior, Évariste Boshab, and now, Emmanuel Ramazani Shadari.

Fortunately for us, thanks to social media, we have pictures. We can provide these pictures to you if you wish. They show law enforcement personnel who received direct orders from the ministers of the interior to open fire on civilians. For the most part, these civilians were children who had nothing more to defend themselves than a stick or something similar.

What we do not hear about these conflicts is that people are raped and that there are hundreds of mass graves.

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: There are 80.

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: There are about 80, not including those that have been officially acknowledged.

The opposition is the primary target of this action, insofar as Joseph Kabila is creating chaos throughout the Democratic Republic of Congo, and in Kasai in particular, where a bastion of the population not only opposes Joseph Kabila's politics, but is also offering a political alternative.

The opposition therefore has no responsibility for these atrocities. The one and only person who can be blamed and questioned about the crimes in Kasai is none other than Mr. Joseph Kabila.

You talked about the role of the international community. As you know, sir, the Kasai region is very rich in diamonds. Diamonds are a raw material that is being extracted by the majority of mining companies listed on the stock exchange, here in Toronto, and in New York and London. I will not mention the names of those companies. One of the justifications for the military presence in these areas is the extraction of diamonds, which are abundant in this part of Congo.

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I would like to add something. With regard to Kasai, certain problems have been raised and it has been said that armed groups, the Kamuina Nsapu, wanted to defy the government. It has been said that this is why the government reacted.

The real story is that this situation has been manipulated by the government to attack the population. In some places, the people have even been chased off their lands so those people could use it. These are places where there are supposed to be mineral deposits. This has all been orchestrated by the government, to the detriment of the population.

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Do these groups work in parallel with the military as well? Do you see that, or do you see them operating independently and having a different influence?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: It is members of the military who are on the ground, not armed groups from outside. It seems that the population have identified soldiers in these military groups who do not speak the local language, whether Lingala, French or Tshiluba.

It is clear that many Congolese law enforcement personnel have understood that the orders from their superiors are not fair, that they do not represent justice. These killings are for the most part being perpetrated by Rwandan and Ugandan military members wearing the uniforms of Congolese police forces.

● (1320)

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: Okay, thank you.

I'm quickly running out of time.

Some of our information indicates that as the pressure's really built on the opposition, one organization that's stepped in to fill the political vacuum has been the Catholic Church. I'm wondering if you can tell me about the role of the Catholic Church.

Also, I'm interested in whether there's any religious aspect to the struggle that's going on. Often we see religious labels being used to cover up long-term different cultural traditions or long-standing animosity between communities. I'm wondering if you can touch on that. Is it your perspective that the church has stepped in to show some leadership on this issue? If so, what role has it played? Does faith and religion, and the understanding of it play a role in this entire conflict, or is that just a minor aspect of this?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: In my opinion, the Church does not necessarily influence the population, but it does help them. There was a meeting between the politicians and the government. They agreed on an approach that will take us to the elections. The Church is acting as a partner between the government and the politicians. The objective of those agreements is being met. The Church is still important in Congo, and has been for years. It supports the population spiritually, as well as financially and socially. When the Church sees that the population is being harmed, it will naturally help out. That is the role the Church plays in such situations.

Perhaps Mr. Kabuya would like to add something.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): That's all the time we have for that round. If you want to add something later on, you can do that with the other questioners as well.

Now we move to Ms. Khalid for seven minutes.

Ms. Iqra Khalid (Mississauga—Erin Mills, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Ms. Kalambay and Mr. Kabuya, for your testimony today and for your very important advocacy on this issue.

In 2017, the UN peacekeeping mission's troop levels were reduced and its budget was also cut. I'm trying to understand what the regional support is that is being provided. What is the role of the African Union in the DRC and in the conflict as well? Is it playing a role in terms of trying to find a political solution and with respect to the upcoming elections in 2018?

Mr. Kabuya, you can take this question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: Thank you very much.

I would like to mention quickly that an agreement was signed on December 31, 2016, known as the Saint Sylvester Agreement. This agreement was facilitated by the Catholic Church. Under one of its clauses, the opposition was supposed to provide a prime minister responsible for forming a transitional government for a period of 12 months, to enable that person to hold elections.

Unfortunately, Mr. Joseph Kabila once again decided to let go certain members of the opposition. He designated an opponent who he thought should lead the transition government. That is when Samy Badibanga and Bruno Tshibala arrived. The Catholic Church, the guarantor of these agreements, wanted to remind the various signatories that they had to comply with the Saint Sylvester Agreement, and the Security Council agreed with that.

To get back to your question about MONUSCO, I would say it is the most important mission that has ever been conducted in the world. It is currently in Congo, specifically in the conflict zones. It is an intervention mission against the various armed groups. Despite the MONUSCO presence in these areas, we are still counting the dead, the victims, and the wars. We do not really see how this mission can stop the shooting itself.

The mission is of course expensive and can be subject to cuts. We have also raised this issue on television. Whether there are cuts or not, we do not really see what purpose this mission serves given the crisis in Congo, which is both economic and political.

It is an economic crisis because the multinationals want access to the strategic raw materials found in Congo. These multinationals are prepared to support dictators who commit crimes and all kinds of violations in order to stay there and keep extracting these raw materials.

The African Union, through the Southern African Development Community, the SADC, has held two meetings. The other meeting, if memory serves me, was two months ago in Zambia. Joseph Kabila was once again reminded that using armed force to stay in power serves only to heighten existing tensions among the various armed groups. It also maintains the tension between the opposition and those in power.

The ultimate objective, and what the international community is calling for, is for free and transparent elections to be held on December 31, as promised in the Saint Sylvester Agreement. That is the reason for these tensions between the opposition and the government.

Ms. Kalambay, would you like to add something?

● (1325)

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: Yes. I would just like to add that the African Union shows us many faces. We believe that, if the African Union applied major pressure on president Kabila, a change would happen. Yet, we do not really feel the presence of the African Union in this conflict. It is as if the African Union and president Kabila were complicity against the Congolese people.

[*English*]

Ms. Iqra Khalid: Thank you.

When we talked about having the elections in December of this year, you spoke about the opposition party. Is the opposition party strong enough to take over should facilitation of free and fair elections occur in the DRC? Is there support for the opposition from the people of the DRC?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: I can guarantee that Joseph Kabila did not win the 2011 election. The Catholic Church, which had more than 36,000 observers at polling stations, specified that Joseph Kabila had clearly not won the election. He simply imposed himself by the force of arms and has remained in power since then. The opposition created a political group called the Rassemblement congolais pour la démocratie. The majority of opposition members were part of that group, including Moïse Katumbi, who is running for president. Another member is Félix Antoine Tshilombo Tshisekedi, who is the UDPS candidate.

Those two leaders are extremely popular in the Congo. Last month, they held a small impromptu protest that brought out more than 300,000 Congolese. During those protests, be they organized inside or outside the country, the Congolese are making their position on a transfer of power known. However, there is a phenomenon described by the UN Security Council, the African Union, the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie and the SADC, and that is the voting machines from South Korea. The South Korean government submitted its complaint against the company that provides those machines. It is actually believed that using them may contribute to massive fraud in elections.

We have documents and images showing that Corneille Nangaa, the President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, CENI, which is in charge of organizing elections, is part of President Kabila's political family. He is currently conspiring with the presidential majority in power to facilitate cheating during the election planned for 2018. We are asking the international community to monitor the election to guarantee transparency. That way, the people will make their choice that will be revealed with the help of the international community, which will act as an observer.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much, Mr. Kabuya.

Now we'll go to Ms. Hardcastle for seven minutes.

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for their compelling testimony today.

I would like to have a clearer picture of what Canada's next steps could be, particularly when we look at the Canadian Congolese diaspora. What are refugees facing and how can we best assist? I know there is a health care crisis at this time with communicable diseases like Ebola. How can we move forward usefully, whether it's independently or through UN organizations? Is something working right now that we need to leverage?

Either of you can go ahead. You can use up my time if you'd like to express other ideas.

● (1330)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: Thank you.

Canada can do a lot. Earlier, I was saying that Canada has credibility in the eyes of the international community. One of the main things Canada can do is to insist that voting machines be eliminated. They are frowned upon by everyone—in another words, the UN, the African Union, the European Union, the SADC, and even the opposition parties that are invited to participate in the election. Everyone is asking for a paper ballot. We are asking that voting machines be eliminated because we suspect that those machines will lead to cheating. Canada can apply pressure in that sense on the UN Security Council, on the Congo's European Union partners and on diplomatic embassies to ask that a ballot be printed.

The Congolese diaspora in Canada, specifically the francophone diaspora, is dynamic. Thanks to organizations such as COCOT, we provide training and orientation sessions under various programs to help Congolese people integrate the Canadian population better, since they become Canadians citizens afterwards. Some of our programs focus on the understanding of good governance, and we have a program for the professional and economic integration of the Congolese in Canada.

You must know, madam, that, if the Congolese are still managing to survive on the ground, it is because members of their family here —all of us—regularly send money to the Congo to help them. We believe that we, the Congolese Canadians, have structures that enable us to work directly with the government of Canada to help our people in the Congo through organizations we know that work well, are credible and understand good governance policies, as Canada expects.

I think that, if the diaspora could intervene with the government of Canada, it would be through organizations like COCOT, which represents Toronto's Congolese community. We also have other organizations across the country representing Congolese interests.

Let's now move on to diseases and the World Health Organization. You have heard about the current Ebola cases. Today, I received information on a case identified at Mama Yemo Hospital. For your information, that hospital is the main such establishment in Kinshasa, where diseases converge. At the outset, the small city of Kinshasa was designed to be home to 800,000 people, but it is now home to 12 million. Those Ebola cases need only spread in the city for us to have an epidemic on our hands.

So we think it is very important to ask the government of Canada to work once again with our Canadian organizations. Those organizations understand the importance of good governance, they understand the importance of not giving in to corruption or embezzlement and of collaborating with organizations on the ground to successfully increase the number of individuals working with sick people. There are a number of diseases. Today, we are talking about tuberculosis in the city of Kinshasa. Tuberculosis is just as dangerous as Ebola or the dozen other diseases we have in the Congo.

We believe this could be done in direct collaboration with Congolese organizations established in Canada, and with the Canadian diplomatic mission in the Congo. I was in the Congo not too long ago, and I stopped by the Canadian embassy. That diplomatic mission includes a cultural attaché. If we work together, I am sure that we could find ways to bring solutions directly to the affected population.

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I would like to add a few words.

Right now, we are using the example of the population of Kasai, where many people have fled from their villages. We are talking about thousands of men, women and children walking on the streets, far from their village. To that is added malnutrition. Children are dying owing to a lack of food, care and appropriate places to stay. That humanitarian aspect is something Canada can bring—because it is good at that—to help those women, children and men who are driven from their village by all those wars.

In Kasai, more than 5,000 people are currently homeless because of wars that are ravaging their villages. In the community, many people have set up organizations to help those men, women and children. Canada has many ways to bring its humanitarian aid directly to the population, without going through the Congolese government. We have noted on a number of occasions that, when aid goes through that government, it never makes it to the people who desperately need it. There are a number of effective organizations in the Congolese diaspora, which could transfer that aid to the right place.

● (1335)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Fragiskatos for five minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos (London North Centre, Lib.): We've examined a number of conflicts in which natural resources might play a negative effect, in fact. The resource curse has been mentioned, when we look at various conflicts in the world. The Congo has $24 trillion in unexploited natural mineral resources, in diamonds, zinc, gold, and cobalt. Everybody in this room has a bit of cobalt in their phone.

Can you speak to this issue, the role that natural resources have played in, it would seem, perpetuating conflict? If it is not in perpetuating conflict, frame it as you wish, but it seems that natural resources have not had a positive effect on the country's development and have fed into the conflict.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: Thank you for your question.

During my introduction, I talked about the fact that the Congolese crisis is humanitarian, but it is first and foremost economic. Most of the conflict zones are in areas with coltan, copper, cobalt and gold, and they are mainly located in the east, such as in Katanga, North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, and so on.

The automotive industry's current development of electric vehicles and the fact that cellphone batteries can last all day is no doubt thanks to the contribution of strategic materials such as copper, cobalt and coltan. Those are found in the devices we use.

You talked about a curse, but I don't believe in that. I rather think that we should be talking about good governance. Canada has raw materials, but there have never been any conflict areas where raw materials are mined in Canada, in the United States or elsewhere. Why are there always conflict zones in Africa? It is because people want to get their hands on raw materials. Canada is recognized globally as a country of mines.

For example, Canada can use its influence to impose a code of conduct when Canadian companies are extracting raw materials. The mines that are presented as dangerous can play a positive role, that of changing the economic situation of those who live in mined areas. Once again, that could increase the performance of Canadian companies, to mention only those, when raw materials are extracted and used.

I think that we have everything to gain by promoting good governance, democratic values and all the established legal rules. So, short of managing conflicts, it will be possible to manage the beneficial economic impacts for everyone—for Canada, the Congo and the rest of the world.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: Mr. Chair, how much time do I have?

● (1340)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Two minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I was going to ask you a question about regional influence, but that is a complicated one—the influence of Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Burundi. Instead I'll ask you a question about future prospects and the extent to which you see something of a space for civil society, whether it's for human rights organizations or an opposition that is intent on implementing meaningful democratic reform and a meaningful democratic transition away from what we are currently seeing from the Kabila government.

Is there any hope for this? Do you see any signs of or any potential for it?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I would say so. According to everything that is currently happening in the Congo—such as the fact that civil society and the opposition political parties have gotten together, as Mr. Kabuya mentioned earlier—they want change. They are working together to achieve that change.

The major problem they are facing is the government's outside support, which is standing in their way. We need help from the outside in the form of strong support for the opposition and for civil society. That would ensure that everything is done properly, whether we are talking about elections or aspects related to social or political life. If things unfold that way—in other words, if outside governments help civil societies and the opposition—everything should work out for the best in the Congo going forward.

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: In that regard, Canada created, at parliamentary level....

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): We'll have to move on to the next questioner. I'm sorry. We ran out of time.

Thank you very much. Time is always our enemy in committees, and I apologize for that.

Mr. Anderson, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. David Anderson: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In other studies that we've done, we've found that the role of the diaspora and the ability of the diaspora to be able to unite makes a difference in terms of solutions to many of these conflicts. How united is the Congolese diaspora in Canada and around the world in trying to see this come to an end?

You mentioned that the war is primarily economic. Typically, that plays a huge role if people have left the country and have economic interests in the country. I'm just wondering if you can talk to that. It may be a more sensitive question than what you want to address. I don't know. I'm just interested in that because I think a solution can often come from outside, from people who have ties to their countries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: If you read Western Union's report, every year, an amount equivalent to $10 billion is sent by the Congolese diaspora to family members. I can even tell you that, if there were no Congolese in the diaspora, the current situation in the Congo would be much worse because the Congolese government does not support anything.

I went to the Congo twice last year. I can tell you that hospitals lack everything. They have no resources. People must pay even for pills for a headache. Often, when the Congolese on the ground are facing various problems—be they social, humanitarian, economic or other in nature—the diaspora gets involved to provide funding.

As for unity in the diaspora, I must tell you that the Congolese people are independently and individually leaving the Congo to seek out a better life here, in Canada, and around the world. So we come with diverging objectives, of course, but we manage to get organized. Humanitarian work is a fairly complex field. I have worked in the francophone community here, in Ontario, at the AFO, the Assemblée de la francophonie de l'Ontario, at the ACFO, the Association canadienne française de l'Ontario, and the UP-MREF, the Union provinciale des minorités raciales ethnoculturelles francophone. You could not find a single converging voice, simply because people have various ways of seeing things and different points of view.

To come back to the Congolese community, we have created at the federal level a round table called the Table de concertation des présidents de la communauté congolaise du Canada. Through that round table, we share converging ideas to see to what extent we can push the impetus toward projects that can help the Congolese get together and work even harder to provide assistance. We first must contribute to Canada's effort, since we are in Canada, and also create a dynamism we can use to help Canada benefit from Congolese people's contribution, as well. Nowadays, the Congolese community consists of doctors, engineers, economists, and the list goes on.

We have an ambitious project to create a Congolese community centre to integrate all the projects that could lead to what you are calling for—unity.

● (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson: I want to come back to a question that Ms. Khalid asked you earlier about the presidential elections and the elections being potentially held in December. Do you anticipate that they will go ahead? What I would like to ask you is how Canada in particular can help to make sure that the elections do go ahead and that there's a peaceful transfer of power. What can we do to contribute? How can we make this happen so that it is carried out in a proper fashion?

Is it going to be put off? I see there are some areas where they don't think they can be ready for an election in 2018-19. I'm just wondering if you can pull this off. Can we pull this off? How can Canada help to do that?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): There is time for a brief answer, please, as brief as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: The only thing Canada can do is send observers who would be on site and work with the Independent National Electoral Commission, CENI, to ensure that there really is transparency in the counting of votes and publishing of the results and to ensure that Mr. Kabila does not run for president because he has used up his two mandates. In compliance with the Congolese constitution, he is not entitled to a third mandate. In addition, of course, voting machines should no longer be used.

With all that, we would have an 80% chance of a fair and transparent election.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much.

Next is Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming here. I apologize that I was a little bit late. I had something else to do, so I didn't hear all of your testimony at the beginning.

In terms of the ongoing conflict and both wars that we've seen in the DRC, impunity continues to play a major role, and those who have committed atrocities aren't held accountable. Have there been any NGOs or international organizations that have helped build strong judicial institutions? Has there been any work to bring those to account? Has there been any progress on building these strong state institutions?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I would say that, with the current government, the issue of judicial institutions is very difficult to resolve because the government is corrupt and that corruption is everywhere. It is difficult to see people who are part of the government act with impunity or have recourse to police forces, even the population, to commit atrocities. Those people will never be punished for their actions because they are subject to authority and that authority is the government. Even members of judicial committees are under government authority. So they cannot have those individuals tried and sentenced for their actions. It is very difficult.

That issue in the Congo cannot be resolved as long as the current government is in power.

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: I would like to add that the majority of generals are known, and their names are in reports published by the UN. Another report was produced after the meeting of September 26, in Geneva. Partners of the Congo were invited to discuss solutions that could lead to a better future, which is related to your concern. They wrote a report on that. If you read it quickly, you will understand that, if an election was held and there was a shift within the Congolese government, many partners of the Congo, including Canada, could work with that new government to implement policies and approaches in line with good governance. However, it is often a regret, when these kinds of resolutions are implemented, not to see them applied.

Most of those who work with Mr. Kabila are under sanctions. They cannot obtain a visa. We have heard about frozen assets in the west. If Canada were to help exert pressure, those people would feel really isolated and would not have any choice but to support transparent elections for the population.

We stress that Canada must play the role of observer. There were Canadian observers in 2006 and 2011. Unfortunately, their numbers were low in 2011. We think that, if Canada could mobilize as many observers as possible, we would be able to ensure a truly transparent election. In addition, if the results were revealed transparently, that would appease the population, and it would then be possible to work with the newly elected leaders.

● (1350)

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): We have enough time. If you have a question, feel free to ask it, Ms. Ng.

Ms. Mary Ng (Markham—Thornhill, Lib.): I'm going to defer to my colleague, because I have to head to the House a little early today.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I'll share that time with Mr. Tabbara.

You mentioned Canada and the potential for Canadian help, and Canada has been assisting recently, obviously, and in years past. I wonder if you could touch on this point of western help. Often western states have been a cause of the problem.

Canada is not Belgium, but I think Canadians want to be assured by the Congolese, and I think you're uniquely placed to answer this question. As members of the diaspora, you have one foot in Canada and one foot in your home country. Is there an appetite, an interest, among those on the ground and the diaspora here in Canada and beyond, to open the door to western assistance? Would there be an antipathy to that, or is that something that would interest the people of the Congo? Leave aside the political leadership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: I'll give you an example from my own life.

In 2014, 2015, and 2016, I spent a lot of time in the Congo. One of the reasons we went there was precisely to set up organizations that would provide the structural benefits, like those Canada is hoping to see. For instance, we created a centre for entrepreneurship to help young people understand what owning a business is all about, how to run a business, which governance policy to adopt for business success, and so forth. The centre also teaches them about interacting with the government in relation to the reforms.

I think Canada has a lot to gain from working with native Congolese who are active in Canada at the community level. I'm going to let you in on a secret: I'm running for a national seat. One of the reasons we now want to become involved in Congolese politics is our experience in a culture of democracy. We have realized how a government should work. We recognize that a government should be accountable to the people, and we understand the role elected government representatives should play in serving the electorate.

I think Canada has a lot to gain from working with Congolese nationals and others who have become Canadian citizens and understand Canada's approach to government. Relying on its approach, Canada can work directly with Congolese populations. Belgium set up Schengen house to manage visa applications, study permits, and so forth.

I think Canada can follow suit and work with us. The COCOT, for example, has quite a good governance structure, having adopted sound governance policies. It has bylaws and rules in place, and elects its leadership on an annual basis. We are endeavouring not just to help the diaspora in Canada, but also to make things easier for them by lightening their load—that load being regularly sending home the little money they earn here. In that sense, we aren't really able to get ahead and enjoy the benefits of living in Canada.

The government has many projects involving the co-operation and immigration departments, among others. If you'd like, we could provide you with information on our programs so that, together, we could determine how you could extend support and work with us. We know what Canada hopes to accomplish through its humanitarian missions. Every Congolese person living in Canada or elsewhere knows how this support could take shape. I would say we are very receptive.

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I'd just like to add something, if I may.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I don't mean to interrupt you, but that was a very fulsome answer. I would love to hear what you have to say, Madam Kalambay, but we only have five minutes and Mr. Tabbara may have a question.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): You have four minutes.

Mr. Peter Fragiskatos: I have four minutes. There you go. We're tight on time.

● (1355)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: I'm going to defer my time.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Go ahead, Ms. Kalambay, if you want to add something to that answer.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Tshala Kalambay: I'd like to follow up on the question that was asked a moment ago.

It is true that Canada has already done a lot to help the Congo, but we are convinced that it can do even more. The reason we are able to stand up and speak out against what is happening in the Congo, as my brother was saying earlier, is that, as Canadians, we learned how things should be done. We saw how things worked in Canada, our host country.

It is quite possible for Canada to provide further structural support to Congolese people, through the diaspora here, thereby helping those still in the Congo. In fact, the reason we are here is to obtain support for the Congolese population still in the Congo, to bring about political, social, humanitarian, and economic improvements. These are all things we learned from Canada.

That is why we are asking Canada for help. We know Canada has provided assistance before and is able to do so again, but on a much more substantial level.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): We have time for a very brief question and a very brief answer.

Mr. Anderson.

Mr. David Anderson: It may be the wrong question to ask at this time of the day, but can you tell us who is funding the various groups? How much is the government funding? How much is coming from outside the country? How much is coming from natural resource production? Who is funding both the rebel groups and the militia that the government has apparently established as well?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Aimé M. Kabuya: Thank you for the question.

The answer is quite simple. Those groups are being used by the anti-election powers that be. Their reasoning is this: if the country is plunged into chaos, it can't hold elections. Therefore, they create rebel groups, on both sides, such as those in Bas-Congo that killed Bundu dia Kongo followers, those in Kasaï that killed members of Kamuina Nsapu, and those in Kivu. It was the Alliance of Democratic Forces, the same militia fighters who speak Kinyarwanda and Kirundi and who are in cahoots with the current government.

The government of Congo is the one funding the atrocities happening all over the country, in order to strengthen its grip on power and justify the decision not to hold elections.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. David Sweet): Thank you very much to our witnesses. We greatly appreciate your testimony. It has been very valuable.

Colleagues, the meeting is adjourned.

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